

Committee to consider redistricting plan today

8hT MAR 21 2011

By Mike Hasten

mhasen@gannett.com

BATON ROUGE — With an urging from Gov. Bobby Jindal to work in a non-partisan manner, a House committee will begin working today on a redistricting plan that some Democrats feel slights them.

In a 10-minute speech, Jindal cautioned House and Senate members to beware of "challenging times ahead" and said they should "come together as Louisianans first, not as Republicans or Democrats first." He said that although things could get heated in this special session, he wants them to mend fences in time for the regular session on the budget starting April 25.

For the first time since Reconstruction, both the House and Senate have Republican majorities. Some Democrats are complaining that the House plan, offered by Speaker of the House Jim Tucker, R-Terrytown, favors Republicans over Democrats. And some Democratic senators are complaining about the Senate plan offered by Senate President Joel Chaisson, D-Destrehan.

The House and Governmental Affairs Committee will begin hearing the proposed House plan at a 9 a.m. hearing today. It's expected to take at least two days of hearings.

The chairman of the committee, Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston, said the panel will "go through it district by district" and "give the public a chance to weigh in," as well as hear from any of the 103 House members who have questions. Two House seats are vacant.

Plan

■ continued from Page 1

Amendments are possible, he said, but members have to submit them ahead of time so staff can juggle the numbers to make the huge jigsaw puzzle fit. Any time one district is altered it has "a ripple effect" on other districts.

Gallot said he is not a co-author of Tucker's HB1. He said he believes it should contain another minority district in the Shreveport area because the numbers warrant another district.

Tucker said Friday that a draft of his bill once contained such a district. But he changed it because he wasn't convinced that the minority population in the new district and one adjacent to it, which would be sectioned to supply black residents to construct the new district, would have sufficient black population to assure that a minority could be elected in both districts.

Gallot said he's concerned that by not drawing the new district, the U.S. Justice Department will reject the plan because of Voting Rights Act provisions that



Liz Condo/AP

Gov. Bobby Jindal addresses members of the Louisiana Legislature on Sunday at the opening day of a special session in Baton Rouge.

say if a minority district can be drawn, it should.

Gallot also has two versions of a congressional reapportionment plan that he said could be heard Wednesday.

The Legislature has to adopt new lines because of population shifts but also because the state is losing a congressional seat, because

of lack of growth.

Sen. Bob Kostelka, R-Monroe, who chairs the Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee, has a different plan that he says six of seven current congressmen like. The seventh, Rep. Jeff Landry of New Iberia, refused to sign off on it because it puts him in a district that's more fa-

vorable to Rep. Charles Boustany of Lafayette.

So far, there's been no agreement on whether to redraw election districts for the Louisiana Supreme Court and state appeals courts. Bills have been filed to redistrict the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Public Service Commission.